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GEORGE SEIBEL



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Bacon versus Shakespeare

Who Wrote the Plays?

By GEORGE SEIBEL

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Pittsburgh
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1919

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TO MY BOOKBINDER

Bind me my books in stuffs and hues that mean
Something, not in a mute and formal guise;
Let every cover hide some keen surprise
To shadow forth the volume's soul unseen!
Habit good Whitman in a garb of green;
Red gold for rare old Plato, dreamer wise;
A mouchoir for my Musset's streaming eyes;
Spenser the gossamer robe of faerie queene.

And bind my Wycherley in hide of swine;
My Burns in homely borrel, stout and strong;
A crazy-patch Verlaine's absinthine song,
And royal purple Marlowe's mighty line;
But—nothing else were fit to case him in—
Bind up Will Shakespeare in a human skin!

If we wish to know the force of human genius, we should read Shakespeare. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning, we may study his commentators.

Hazlitt's *Table Talk*

Did Bacon Write Shakespeare?

TWO master minds, many centuries apart, have appeared upon this globe. In the days of Alexander the Great, the genius of Greece flowered in the analytic intellect of Aristotle. The mightiest synthetic brain that ever dwelt within the cavern of a human skull came in "the spacious times of great Elizabeth," in Master William Shakespeare, of Stratford-on-Avon, poacher, player, poet—"master of the revels to mankind"!

As Aristotle could take to pieces all the achievements of the human race, like some surgeon in the dissecting-room, so Shakespeare, like a great architect, builded of dreams and passions those lofty temples and towers of poetry which the tempests of time and the revolutions of history have not bereft of their grace and grandeur.

Both of these giants have encountered detraction, but from different directions. Aristotle's philosophy, which began with observation and experiment, degenerated into futile speculation and deadly dogma. Remember how Galileo was persecuted because he saw spots on the sun, which Aris-

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totle, who had no telescope, had pronounced to be perfect. Remember Victor Hugo's battle against the Three Dramatic Unities falsely deduced from the *Poetics*. Aristotle fell into contempt through the stupidity of the Aristotelians.

The attacks upon Shakespeare have been of a different nature. Aside from Bernard Shaw and old Tolstoy, neither of whom need be taken very seriously in this field, no one has denied the supreme genius of Shakespeare. But since the day of Delia Bacon, a poor crazy creature who succeeded in enlisting the sympathy of Nathaniel Hawthorne, there have been many who have asserted, and have labored diligently to prove, that the great plays were written, not by the ignorant actor from Stratford, but by the erudite Francis Bacon, whom Pope described as "the wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind."

Joseph C. Hart, American consul at Santa Cruz, in a book on *The Romance of Yachting*, published in 1848, was perhaps the earliest to question Shakespeare's authorship. Miss Bacon's first article on the subject appeared in *Putnam's Monthly*, in 1856, and she died, in 1859, having labored zealously to establish the delusion endeared to her by family pride. William Henry Smith, of London, in 1856 suggested Bacon as the real author, after the

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doubts about Shakespeare had been raised. Nathaniel Holmes, a Missouri lawyer, Edwin Reed of Boston, and Judge Webb of England, are others who have wasted their time in the same way. Societies have been started and magazines have been published to promote the delusion, so that a bibliographer in 1884 could already enumerate two hundred and fifty-five books and pamphlets on the subject, and now there are probably nigh a thousand. Lawyers are especially liable to be afflicted, perhaps because they are fascinated by the task of making out a case upon slender evidence.

It even became a popular literary diversion to find ciphers in Shakespeare's plays proving that Lord Bacon was the real author. In his youth, as a diplomat at a foreign court, Bacon had devised a system of secret writing. Out of this little acorn has grown a tall forest of overshadowing oaks. Beginning with Ignatius Donnelly, a Greenback lawyer of Minneapolis, and down to Mrs. Gallup of Detroit and Mr. Booth of Cambridge, cipher after cipher has been found in Shakespeare's plays. Evidently Bacon thought one cipher was not enough. He wished to leave nothing to chance. He put in so many ciphers that it is surprising there was room left for any ideas. It does not matter that you can use these ciphers to read

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almost anything into Shakespeare. I once applied one of the codes, and discovered that *Othello* had been written by Bill Nye, who was in reality the Lost Dauphin. That only serves to show what a marvelous man Bacon was.

These cipherers assure us that Bacon wrote not only the works of Shakespeare, besides those published under his own name, but also the works of Marlowe, of Greene, of Peele, some of Ben Jonson's, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Montaigne's *Essays*. One begins to wonder when and how he found time to write his own works. Whatever was going on in his day and generation, no George being about, evidently the rule was, "Let Francis do it." Astonishing how much ingenuity has gone to seed, how much industry has been misapplied, how logic has been twisted, how every crime, from burglary to punning, has been resorted to, in order to disprove what no sane man has ever doubted.

However, it is a curious and diverting by-path of literature to follow the bizarre arguments evolved by the Baconians. Perhaps it should not be regarded strictly as an exercise for the literary man; it borders closely upon the province of the alienist. Bacomania is a disease, and that some men of keen discrimination, like Mark Twain

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and Walt Whitman, were not immune, shows that any cult can secure adherents, if only it is absurd enough. It takes a lot of brains to believe some things.

Because hundreds of books have been written to bolster up the absurdity, many otherwise rational people, without time to investigate the question, have come to believe that "there may be something in it." So it may be well to examine a few of the queer and amazing arguments advanced to prove that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. Truly, most of these reasons hardly require any answer, for, like "the flowers that bloom in the spring," they "have nothing to do with the case." Nearly all are based upon the supposed ignorance and illiteracy of Shakespeare, his progenitors and his descendants. Shakespeare could not write, runs the argument; therefore he did not write the plays. Bacon *could* write; therefore *he* must have written them.

At the outset, it is insisted with much fervor that Shakespeare's father could neither read nor write. If this were demonstrated beyond any doubt, it would prove nothing more than that Shakespeare's father did not write the plays. But the fact is that Shakespeare's father, who was once the chief magistrate of Stratford, could write with facility, of which the

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Stratford archives afford proof. Undaunted, the ardent Baconians further insist that Shakespeare's mother could neither read nor write. That is merely another proof that Shakespeare must have written the plays himself, for it shows that his mother did not. What tremendous logic such contentions evince! The mother of Napoleon Bonaparte never owned a cannon; therefore Napoleon could not have won the battle of Austerlitz. The mother of Christopher Columbus never ran a ferry; therefore Columbus did not discover America.

Our Baconian friends, not content with proving Shakespeare's ancestors illiterate, also insist that his daughter Judith could neither read nor write. Shakespeare had another daughter, named Susannah, who was called "witty above her sex." The Baconians forget to mention her, perhaps because they are afraid some one might suggest that Susannah Shakespeare wrote the plays. John Milton's oldest daughter could not write, but that does not invalidate his claim to be the author of *Paradise Lost*. But what difference does it make how dull or how clever the other members of the Shakespeare family were? No one suspects or accuses them of having written the plays. We are concerned only with Master William.

At this point the Baconian hastens to exhibit a series of Shakespeare's own autographs—roughly scrawled and variously spelled. These, if they are genuine, are all the traces left by Shakespeare's pen—five badly written signatures, not a syllable more.

An additional signature has been discovered by Prof. C. W. Wallace in the British Record Office. Baconians argue that this signature is not Shakespeare's, but the clerk's who drew up the deposition in the lawsuit. Careful comparison shows that the signature is different from the clerkly script and strikingly resembles the writing on the will.

This paucity of papers might be hard to get over, if we had bales of manuscript by other Elizabethan writers. But from most of them we have not even a single signature. As for poor writing showing absence of genius, many a man can write copper-plate script, but has not a thought worthy of setting down. Horace Greeley wrote such a wretched scrawl that frequently he himself could not decipher it. Of course, that settles it: Horace Greeley never wrote any editorials in the *Tribune*.

It would be very easy to manufacture such negative Baconian evidences by the bushel. The first William Shakespeare there is any record of was hanged for rob-

bery in 1248—and, of course, it will be readily admitted that high poetic genius could not flourish in a family disgraced by an outlaw. As three William Shakespeares were living in Warwickshire between 1560 and 1614, it might be readily asserted that the name was so common as to occur at once to Bacon when he needed a *nom de plume*, just as the well-known citizen nowadays arrested in a raid on a poker-palace invariably gives the name of John Smith. The Baconians have actually discovered one Shakespeare who was so thoroughly ashamed of his name that he had it changed to Saunders.

Following up their assumption of hereditary illiteracy in the Shakespeare family, the Baconians go on to assert that William must have received very scant schooling. As if the plays of Shakespeare required a profound knowledge of Latin and Greek, science and philosophy, historic and juristic lore for their writing! In truth, they exhibit sad lack of these things, although Shakespeare possessed a very fair education for that period and his station in life. We have letters in Latin written by two of his schoolmates at the Stratford free school; one of these lads, at the age of eleven, displays a very respectable Latinity. There is no reason for supposing that Master Will was behind his

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chums in class. They also learned the rudiments of Greek under a headmaster from Oxford. Besides these classic tongues Shakespeare had some French, a smattering of Italian, and perhaps a bit of Spanish. There is testimony to all this from his friends and companions, and it may be seen in the plays. At the same time his knowledge of these languages was neither extensive nor exact, as Bacon's was. Shakespeare knew the world better than books. He read the hearts of men, rather than the pages of dead poets and philosophers. Not vast learning and deep erudition were required to produce his plays, only the flash and flame of genius. "I could write like Shakespeare if I had the mind," said a vain poet, and a caustic wit retorted, "You could—if you had the mind." As Emerson has written, "it is the essence of poetry to spring, like the rainbow daughter of Wonder, from the invisible, to abolish the past and refuse all history."

Was it not strange, if Bacon wrote the plays, that in one play whose plot is almost a free invention, he gives us glimpses and souvenirs of some of Shakespeare's neighbors at Stratford-on-Avon? That play is *The Merry Wives of Windsor*—and, by the way, it contains excerpts from the very Latin grammar that was in use at the

Stratford Latin School during Shakespeare's boyhood. Was it also a mere coincidence that when Shakespeare had his *Venus and Adonis* printed, the first work to bring him prominently before the public, he gave the job to a printer who had come to London from Stratford a few years before him? There were other printers, but he went to his townsman, Richard Field.

It is true that Shakespeare left no manuscripts, and upon this fact the Baconians base many triumphant sneers. It is a great pity that we haven't a copy of *Hamlet* in Shakespeare's handwriting to confute them. But it should be very easy for them to produce a copy of *Hamlet* in Bacon's handwriting, should it not? Indeed, if Bacon had written the plays, we probably would have the manuscripts. He was not, like Shakespeare, careless of his literary reputation. He would have fished the pages of copy out of the dust-bins of the London printers. Perhaps also he would have been prudent enough to write on asbestos, so that the book of the play or the actors' parts would not have been destroyed in the burning of the Globe Theater in 1613, nor in the great fire of London in 1666. It would be marvelous, indeed, if any of Shakespeare's manuscripts had escaped destruction. Of some contemporaries not even a printed line sur-

vives. Richard Hathway, highly praised by Francis Meres, was one of the most popular authors of comedy, yet we have not a single line of one of his comedies, though we know the titles of sixteen. Coming to an even later age, no one knows where there is a single page of the manuscript of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Besides leaving no manuscripts, it has been said, Shakespeare left no books. What of that? His library, doubtless, was small. It included North's *Plutarch* and Holinshed's *Chronicles*. We have a copy of Florio's *Montaigne* with Shakespeare's autograph and some notes, commenting on thoughts imbedded in the plays. Perhaps neither the notes nor the autograph are genuine, but the argument in their favor summed up by Gervais is better than that for Bacon's so-called *Promus*, which we shall examine later.

Having thus in various indirect ways cast suspicion upon Shakespeare's ability to write the plays, the Baconians launch into the wildest assertions with regard to Shakespeare's life and fame. We know almost nothing about Shakespeare, they have said so many times, that many people who are not Baconians have come to believe this true. The fact is that we know more of Shakespeare's life than we know about any other poet of that age, except

Ben Jonson. We even know that Shakespeare's father was fined twelve pence for having a heap of dirt before his door, and that in 1598 the dramatist himself defaulted his own taxes in London. We can count about three hundred references and allusions to Shakespeare in the writings of contemporaries between 1591 and the date of his death, 1616. For a mere butcher, brewer, and pawnbroker, as the Baconians depict him, this means much!

To say, as the Baconians do, that when Shakespeare died no one in England dreamed of mourning the death of a great poet, that no obituaries in prose or verse show he was held in high esteem, is a fabrication that can proceed only from cheerful ignorance or supreme audacity. Within a few years of the Bard's death, a monument was erected to him in Stratford—with an epitaph whose laudatory phrases would have been extravagant if applied to any other—while many contemporary writers lament the world's loss and prophesy the dead poet's immortal renown.

Shakespeare cannot have been dead more than a few years when the poet William Basse glorified him in a sonnet—naming him with Chaucer, Spenser, and Beaumont, who lay buried in Westminster Abbey, bidding them lie closer to make

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room for Shakespeare, and then deciding it would be more fitting that

“In this uncarved marble of thy own,
Sleep, brave tragedian, Shakespeare, sleep alone.”

Having, as they think, put Shakespeare out of the way by their pen-pricks, “with twenty trenched gashes on his head,” every cryptic utterance or allusion made by Bacon or his friends at any time is construed by the Baconians as a reference to Bacon’s authorship of the plays. He once wrote to King James that, with a full understanding of what he was doing he suppressed his name and genius. What warrant is there for assuming that this had any reference to the Shakespearean plays? When Bacon writes of works that would make his name far more celebrated than it was, if they were published as his own, he may have spoken truly, but how could they be published as his own if he had not written them? When he writes that “I have (though in a despised weed) procured the good of all men,” there is nothing to show he was referring to any adventures in dramatic authorship. Again, when removed from office, he is quoted as writing to the Spanish ambassador that he would now “retire from the stage of civil action and betake myself to letters, and to the instruction of the actors themselves and the service of posterity.” Since all of Shake-

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speare's plays were written long before 1621—the latest being produced in 1613, eight years before Bacon decided to betake himself to letters, and thirteen years before he died—it is impossible to establish any connection between this utterance and the genesis of the great dramas. And Bacon's chief claim to have served posterity is as the discoverer of cold storage, not as founder of a dramatic school.

We are told that Bacon advocated the use of a pen-name for literary men. Why, then, did he not publish his *Essays* and other authentic works under a pen-name? The same severe logicians who tell us Shakespeare's parents were illiterate, assure us that Bacon's father published a great deal anonymously and under assumed names. Do they wish us to believe that perhaps Bacon's father wrote Shakespeare's plays?

They insist that Bacon's mother published translations from the Latin, but never allowed her name to appear on the title-page. The work she translated was Bishop Jewell's *Apology for the Church of England*, and, as the worthy prelate's own name does not appear on the title-page, we cannot draw any weighty deductions from the absence of hers.

Right here, however, arises another consideration. Several of the ciphers found

by ingenious Baconians in the works of Shakespeare assert that Bacon was really the son of Queen Elizabeth. Being very learned, the Queen herself might have made those translations; if so, the monumental self-effacement of the other lady is accounted for. If not, and if Queen Elizabeth was really Mrs. Leicester, and Bacon's mother, how can the fact that Lady Anne Bacon did not print her name on the title-page of a theological tract prove that her adopted son must have written the works of Shakespeare?

Bacon wrote a prose history of Henry VII, which we are told fills the gap in the king dramas, between *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*. Why, if he wished to fill the gap, didn't he write a play around Henry VII? Why did he leave so many other gaps unfilled—three Henrys, five Edwards, to say nothing of Richard I?

The inconvenient little word "why" is the rock upon which most of the Baconian arguments go to pieces. Do they really deserve to be called arguments? Because in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mistress Quickly says, "Hang-hog is Latin for Bacon," and because Bacon's crest was a boar with a halter, and because "Ham-let" may be a diminutive derivative of a pig, we are expected to doubt all the plain testimony of Shakespeare's friends and

Bacon's. As John Fiske said, "By such methods one can prove anything."

Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence, a fierce Baconian, produces a queer line of argument from *As You Like It*. In Touchstone, "the courtier who is playing clown," he recognizes Bacon. "Notice that Touchstone refuses to be married to Audrey (who probably represents the plays of Shakespeare) by a *Mar-text*, and she declares that the Clown William 'has no interest in me in the world.' William—shall we say Shakespeare of Stratford?—enters, and;"—but why go on with this far-fetched fancy, which to the Baconian type of mind is close-knit reasoning.

Another staggering argument asserts that thirty-two obituaries written on Bacon laud him as the greatest of dramatic poets. Is it not strange that a secret so widely known should have been so sacredly kept until a crazy American woman guessed it after two hundred years or more? Of course, it is admitted that obituaries and epitaphs always tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Many a man whose endorsement was not worth thirty cents during his lifetime, might borrow a fortune in any bank if he could come back with his tombstone as evidence of his high standing in the community.

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Those odes, written about Bacon after he had died, were collected by his friend William Rawley. In one of them the Muse of Tragedy exclaims, "Give me back my Apollo!" Since Apollo never wrote any comedies or tragedies, how could this mean that Bacon did? Another ode calls Bacon "Quirinus"—a Latin word which may be twisted to mean "Spear-Shaker." Romulus, the founder of Rome, was likewise called "Quirinus;" are we to deduce that he wrote *Julius Caesar*? Another ode in the collection calls Bacon "Pinus," which also, we are told, means "Shake-Spear." Now "Pinus" means "pine-tree," and by metonymy, since spears were made of pine-trees, it was sometimes used for "spear," but certainly it did not mean "Shake-Spear." "Pinus" in the same way means "ship;" did Bacon write *Mother Shipton's Prophecy*? It also means "torch;" did he write Rostand's *Aiglon* and portray himself as Flambeau? Such is Baconian reasoning—it almost inclines one to believe the Baconians have little Latin and less common sense.

Dean Williams extols Bacon as "the greatest pride of the Muses and the Apollo to the Chorus." Up to date the Nine Ladies from Helicon have not been heard from in regard to the matter. George Wither addresses Bacon as "Chancellor

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of Parnassus"—which to the Baconians is fraught with tremendous significance. If some one had called Bacon door-keeper of the universe, the Baconians would scent therein an allusion to the Globe Theater.

But one of the references most fondly cited by the Baconians should effectively dispose of all the claims that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays. Doctor Sprat said of him in 1607: "I am sure he does the work of twenty men." Evidently Bacon was far too busy all his life to write thirty-seven plays!

The waggish poet of a Chicago newspaper has satirized the Baconians in an amusing poem entitled *Bacon's Busy Day*:

Sir Francis Bacon rose at five

And said: "As sure as I'm alive,

I've got to get a move on me

If ever famous I shall be."

He nibbed his quill, and fixed his ink,

And rubbed his head, and tried to think;

And then, like gathering blackberries,

He wrote J. Cæsar's Commentaries.

To while away an hour he wrote

The Pilgrim's Progress, with a note

To the effect that Bunyan should

Be called the author, if he would;

Then, yawning ere he should begin,

He wrote a work on medicine,

And, just to save a lot of pother,

He named Hippocrates as author.

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Then to his breakfast, but between
The grapefruit and the ham 'twas seen
He scribbled still, by fits and jerks,
The most of old Josephus' works;
Then, smoking, with his long legs crossed,
Wrote *Paradise Regained*, and *Lost*,
And *Scottish Chiefs*, while as a solo
He sang the works of Marco Polo.

"I'm lazy," sighed he, "what's the use?"
And wrote the books of Mother Goose;
Then penned, to start his cipher steps,
The diary of Samuel Pepys;
R. Crusoe's thrilling tale was next
To leave his pen with flowing text,
And then, to please his maiden auntie,
He wrote the rampant rhymes of Dante.

The works of Virgil then he penned,
And Homer's verse, from start to end;
Then *Fox's Martyrs*, and a bit
Of quaint Aristophanic wit—
And then all day he worked like sin
To put the hidden ciphers in.
That night, with many a splashy shiver,
He sank all this beneath a river.

One Bacomaniac makes exultant reference to a statement by Jonson that Bacon "filled up all numbers," which is said to mean that "he wrote poetry in every conceivable meter." As the works of Shakespeare do not contain poetry in every conceivable meter, it would seem reasonably certain that Jonson was thinking of some-

thing else. Bacon wrote verses. Most competent critics who have read them agree that they are not poetry at all, but badly rhymed prose. Read the poems ascribed to Bacon, and you will never suspect him of *Romeo and Juliet* or *Timon of Athens*. After scanning the paraphrases of some Psalms that Bacon published, one is sure he never penned the sublime prayer of Lear nor the torrential passion of *Antony and Cleopatra*. What if Jonson did call him the greatest word-painter in the English language? If it were sober truth, instead of delirious adulation, it would not prove that he had written Shakespeare.

Parallel thoughts by the thousand are found in Bacon and Shakespeare—by the Baconians. When other people examine these parallelisms, they sift down to a score or so. There are more parallels between Shakespeare and almost any other Elizabethan poet than between Shakespeare and Bacon. At most, such parallels are only proof that Shakespeare had read Bacon, or that Bacon had read Shakespeare, or that both had read in the same authors.

Superficial resemblances between the vocabulary of Bacon and that of Shakespeare really have very little significance. The vocabulary of all Elizabethan writers

is very much alike. Bacon uses many words that Shakespeare used; but Shakespeare uses many words that Bacon never knew.

Bacon, who almost thought in Latin, whose literary style was modeled upon Tacitus and Cicero, lacked the airy abandon of Shakespeare's unpremeditated art. Doctor Rawley said of him: "Neither was he given to any light conceits, or descanting upon words, but did ever purposely and industriously avoid them." Would he have let Hamlet make his first bow with a pun? Shakespeare plays with words as with colored balls, tossing them carelessly about; Bacon counts them carefully like golden coins. Not so the Baconians.

As has been said before, even puns become potent arguments in the Baconian armory. We are told to look at Bacon's signature. After the "B" there is an interval and "acon" standing all by itself. We are told that "acon" is Greek for "javelin"—that it is an obsolete word describing a peculiar sort of spear. The word is not "acon," but "akontium;" it was not obsolete, and there is nothing peculiar about it except the use to which it is put by the Baconians. The appropriate answer to this whole argument is furnished by Doctor Johnson: "A man that will

make so poor a pun will not hesitate to pick a pocket."

There is yet worse to come. Bacon was Baron of Verulam; "veru" is a Latin word meaning "spear," and the old English word "lam" is equivalent to "shake." All through the plays of Shakespeare, even in *Hamlet*, are many puns, but none quite so vile as this hybrid; therefore we cannot believe that the man who perpetrated the "Verulam" atrocity was the same that wrote the plays.

The Baconians are also very fond of scanning title-pages of early editions of Shakespeare's dramas, finding in the arabesques the syllables "Ba" and "con." These mystic scrolls are usually visible only to Baconians, who are as adept as Polonius at descrying anything suggested to them in the clouds of their fantastic theory. It never occurs to them that the syllable "Ba" may be an expression of contempt for the "con," a slang term for a swindle, of which they are the victims.

A head-piece exhibited by the Baconians shows a bag and the figure of a "cony," the Old English name for the rabbit. Can it be that Bacon also wrote *Wild Animals I Have Known*, which is commonly attributed to Ernest Thompson Seton, and the *Uncle Remus* tales a gullible generation be-

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lieved were written by Joel Chandler Harris?

One of these Baconians has declared that some title-pages labeled with the name of Shakespeare are adorned with a head-piece flanked by birds for "B," and in the center are the letters "acon"—together constituting "Bacon." Only a little more ingenuity would be needed to prove clearly that Bacon wrote the works ascribed to Audubon. The birds give us the clue. Pray note that both names end alike, and that four letters of Bacon's name are in the name of Audubon. Many Baconian arguments are built upon less solid foundations.

Perhaps all this may explain Robert Greene's bitter diatribe against Shakespeare—"an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers." Indeed, this passage is often pointed to as proof that Shakespeare was masquerading in borrowed plumage. Since Greene was complaining that the feathers had been plucked from himself and his friends, he does not make a very good witness for the Bacon claimants—before an intelligent jury.

Now comes the weightiest evidence of all. If a man admits a crime, his conviction would appear to be certain. Bacon, in a letter to the poet Sir John Davies, asked him "to be good to all concealed

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poets." If Bacon was a poet, he concealed it so effectually that the greater part of the world has not yet discovered him. Spedding, the best of Bacon's editors and biographers, has deliberately written:

"If it could be proved that Shakespeare did not write the plays, I should believe that any one else had written them sooner than Bacon."

That is the testimony of the man who knew the subject better than any other modern critic. He was familiar not only with Bacon's life, but also with every line Bacon had written, and he was one of Bacon's most loyal admirers. Yet he assures us that he believes Bacon was altogether unqualified to produce the plays ascribed to Shakespeare. Nevertheless, the Baconians, because Bacon mentioned "concealed poets," are ready to believe that he wrote *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. When on another occasion, having written a sonnet to greet Queen Elizabeth, he excused its defects by saying, "I profess not to be a poet," this is regarded as double-dyed dissimulation and accepted as circumstantial evidence to clinch the case.

"Trifles light as air" are to the Baconians "confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ." They insist that Bacon, in the midst of his prose, often dropped into poetry and even into rhyme. So did Silas

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Wegg—shall we accuse him of the *Ode to a Grecian Urn*?

Not satisfied with Bacon's own confession, the Baconians summon his secretary, who testifies that "everything he wrote sounded like poetry." That secretary would have made a fine press agent. He deserves more credit for admiring loyalty than for literary discrimination. No wonder Bacon, in his last will and testament, left him five hundred pounds! Still, it will be readily admitted that even Bacon's poems sound like poetry, though they are not.

And now comes Sir Tobie Matthew, a great traveler, Bacon's literary friend, his successor in Parliament. Sir Tobie, we are told, wrote to Bacon that "the greatest of all poets bears your lordship's name, though he be known under another." The exact words of Tobie Matthew are as follows:

"The most prodigious wit that ever I knew of my nation and of this side of the sea, is of your lordship's name, though he be known by another."

Being written on the continent, this could only mean that Matthew had there met somebody whose name was Bacon, though he went under another. There was such a man on the continent at the time—a learned Jesuit known as Thomas Southwell,

whose real name was Bacon. Matthew, a recent convert to Catholicism, was very likely to be thrown into just such society, and to form an extravagant estimate of such a man. So much for Sir Tobie!

With regard to the publication of Shakespeare's plays, some amazing statements are made—as, for instance, that the great majority first appeared anonymously. A few did appear anonymously, but none appeared without Shakespeare's name after his great fame had been established, though they were pirated and printed without his consent. Indeed, his popularity was so great that booksellers ascribed to him many dramas that were not his; and despite the allegations of the Baconians, Shakespeare thought enough of his literary reputation to make a bookseller upon one occasion remove his name from the title-page of a spurious work. This was a poem, *The Passionate Pilgrim*—his dramatic works he does not appear to have regarded as real literature, but rather as a journalist of our day might view his ephemeral pot-boiling editorials.

If it is contended that the plays remained anonymous until 1600, even as to the entries in the Hall of Records, we might point to Lady Anne Bacon, who omitted her well-known name from the title-page of a very popular work. The truth is

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that *Love's Labor's Lost*, probably Shakespeare's first play written alone, was printed in 1598 with his name on the title-page. The first play printed that we know of, *Romeo and Juliet*, had appeared only one year earlier, in 1597. Francis Meres, writing in 1598, knew no less than twelve of Shakespeare's plays, and attests that their authorship was widely known. "The Muses," he says, "would speak Shakespeare's fine filed phrase, if they could speak English."

After Shakespeare's popularity had begun, the booksellers never omitted his name. On the title-page it was spelled Shakespere or Shake-speare. In the authentic autographs we have, the name is spelled S-h-a-k-s-p-e-r-e, minus an "e" and an "a." Much has been made of this by the Baconians, but at most it proves only that the piratical booksellers may not have known how to spell the name of the man whose property they had stolen. People at that time spelled phonetically—according to the Go-as-You-Please Spelling rediscovered by Andrew Carnegie and Prof. Brander Matthews, the Great Simplifiers. This being so, the name of Shakespeare's father, found sixty-six times in the Stratford registers, is there spelled sixteen different ways. Surely the name of Sir Walter Raleigh was well known;

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yet his name in contemporary documents is spelled in about forty different ways. He himself spelled it sometimes Rauley and sometimes Raleigh—yet he was one of the learned men of that age.

Curious and recondite hints about Bacon's authorship of Shakespearean plays are discovered everywhere—by the Baconians. In the *First Folio* of 1623, the last comedy but one is *As You Like It*; the title of the last but one of Bacon's *Essays*, we are told, also reads *As You Like It*. In order to realize how baseless and irrelevant this argument is, remember that the *First Folio* was published by a printers' syndicate and some of Shakespeare's actor friends, so that Bacon had nothing whatever to do with the arrangement of the plays. As for an essay of such title, Bacon's works fail to reveal it.

It is worth noting, because of the peculiar light it sheds upon the mathematical processes of Bacomania, that in this enumeration one is asked to count backward, starting from the end of the whole of Bacon's *Essays* and from the end of the first division of the plays in the *Folio*. It is a fundamental principle of Bacomania that you begin to count anywhere you like, so long as you end where you wish. One arithmetical Sherlock Holmes discovers profound significance in the fact that *An-*

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Antony and Cleopatra is the tenth tragedy, and that the tenth essay of Bacon likewise deals with Antony's mad infatuation for Cleopatra. This time the count begins at the beginning of the complete *Essays* and at the beginning of the second division of the plays. Bacon merely mentions Antony and his affinity in the essay, which has no relation whatever to Shakespeare's tragedy. But from a little molehill such as this, a Baconian easily makes a Chimborazo. The word "honorificabilitudinitatibus," in *Love's Labor's Lost*, has been made the basis of computations like those by which crazy millennarians fix the precise date of the world's end from the books of *Daniel* and *Revelation*.

Edwin Bormann, a German humorist who perpetrated an unconscious masterpiece in a book on the Baconian theory, declares that whenever Francis Bacon had time on hand, volumes of Shakespeare were published. How Herr Bormann found out when Bacon had nothing to do, is not quite clear. Probably by reverse reasoning he deduced that Bacon had nothing to do whenever plays by Shakespeare made their appearance. According to all his biographers, Bacon led a very busy life; one of them, as we have seen, says "he did the work of twenty men." The Shakespeare Quartos began to appear in num-

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erous editions from 1597 to 1611, in the very years when Bacon should have been most occupied. No new plays were produced after Shakespeare's death in 1616, though Bacon lived ten years longer, and toward the last had practically nothing to do, having in 1621 retired from public office in disgrace.

The statement that during the five closing years of Bacon's life a number of new Shakespearean dramas were published is based upon the fact that many of the plays in the *First Folio* of 1623 are there printed for the first time. It is certain, however, that they had been written and performed long before—and as we have seen, Bacon had nothing to do with their publication. Heminge and Condell, actor friends of Shakespeare, remembered by him in his will, caused the *Folio* to be printed, seven years after his death, as a monument to his memory. Every one who knows the story of the *First Folio*, the most precious book in the world, a copy of which would bring at auction twenty thousand dollars, knows that no better proof of Shakespeare's authorship could be adduced. Has any other poet ever had a memorial to compare with the *First Folio*?

Arguments based upon certain of the plays deserve some consideration. It has been pointed out, for instance, that *Henry*

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VIII could not possibly have been written in its present form before 1621, whereas Shakespeare died in 1616. In the scene showing the dismissal of Cardinal Wolsey, the two gentlemen who acted in Wolsey's case do not appear; in their place are the four nobles who in 1621 came before Francis Bacon to demand that he surrender the Great Seal of the Realm, after he had pleaded guilty to charges of corruption and bribery. The four nobles referred to are the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, the Earl of Surrey and the Lord Chamberlain. We might well ask whether there were no earlier Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, whether the Earl of Surrey and the Lord Chamberlain were inventions of Bacon? But that would not remove a peculiar coincidence. The difficulty is cleared up when we recall that Shakespearean scholars are practically agreed that only a few scenes of *Henry VIII* are by Shakespeare; Fletcher and Massinger likely have written the rest. So the point raised becomes one of minor moment. But we also know that the play was acted in 1613, when the Globe Theater was burned down by a fire caused by discharging cannon during the performance; hence attempts to connect it with Bacon's disgrace eight years later are somewhat far-fetched. If any alteration

was made in the cast, Ben Jonson, who was friendly to Bacon, may have done it at a later revival, for the sake of the sympathy to be enkindled by such an allusion.

Bacon, after his disgrace and fall, wrote the king a letter in which he compared himself with the great cardinal. "Cardinal Wolsey said"—these are Bacon's words—"that if he had pleased God as he pleased the king, he had not been ruined. My conscience saith no such thing. But it may be if I had pleased men as I have pleased you, it would have been better with me." In these words the Baconians detect a startling similarity to Wolsey's oft-quoted lines:

"Had I but served my God with half the zeal
I served my king, He would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies."

This similarity, at most, would prove that Bacon had read or seen Shakespeare's play, and quoted from it imperfectly. But as the words are actually Wolsey's own, recorded by George Cavendish in his life of the Cardinal, written before either Shakespeare or Bacon was born, not even this faint contact can be established. According to Cavendish, Wolsey said: "If I had served God as diligently as I have done the king, he would not have given me over in my gray hairs." Shakespeare is more faithful to the record than Bacon.

Two literary finds have been used as props for the Baconian theory—the so-called *Promus* and the “Northumberland Manuscripts.”

Mrs. Pott, a more industrious than ingenuous exponent of the Baconian theory, came across the memorandum-book now known as the *Promus*. It is assumed that this memorandum-book was owned by Bacon, and it is broadly alleged that it contains notes afterward used in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. To call the *Promus* a memorandum-book is the first piece of presumption. It is merely a school-boy’s copy-book, and has no apparent connection with either Bacon or Shakespeare. Eduard Engel examined the *Promus*, which is in the British Museum, and expressed the opinion that it contains the scribblings of three different school-boys. Bacon’s hand-writing does not resemble any of the three. Aside from proverbs in Latin and English, the profound thoughts which it contains consist of phrases like “Good-morning!” “Good-evening!” and similar commonplaces. Moreover, Mrs. Pott has apparently resorted to deliberate misreading to score a point. She has substituted for the plainly legible word “vane,” at the end of a Latin quotation, the word “rome,” in order to secure a remote resemblance to the word “Romeo.”

The expressions "golden sleep" and "up-rouse" are found in the *Promus*; they also occur in *Romeo and Juliet*. This, to Mrs. Pott, is proof conclusive that the *Promus* was Bacon's note-book in writing *Romeo and Juliet*. To the Shakespearean scholar nothing could be more ridiculous, more transparent, than this *Promus* humbug. Before it can be used to prove anything about either Bacon or Shakespeare, some one must prove that Bacon wrote it or had anything to do with it.

A somewhat more interesting problem is presented by the "Northumberland Manuscript," discovered at Northumberland House in 1867. This was a packet of miscellaneous manuscripts by various authors—Bacon, Shakespeare, Nash, and others. On the title-page the names William Shakespeare and Francis Bacon are written side by side over a dozen times. Only a few of Bacon's own manuscripts remained in the packet; of course it would not occur to the Baconians that the owners of the other manuscripts might have come to claim them. In one part of the manuscript, where *Richard II* and *Richard III* are mentioned, the name of Francis Bacon has been crossed out, and the name of William Shakespeare substituted. What does this indicate except that whoever wrote the index of the contents had made a mistake

and corrected it? The Baconians find a deep significance in the crossing out of Bacon's name. They would have an argument of real weight if Bacon's name had not been crossed out, or if Shakespeare's had been crossed out and Bacon's put in.

Coming to the portraits of Shakespeare, the Baconians are in clover. We are told that the *Folio* edition of the dramas has the author's portrait, and that this does not in the least resemble Shakespeare's bust in Stratford Church. We are also informed that the Shakespeare of the *Folio* wears the costume of a courtier.

The costume has little to do with it. Shakespeare was an actor, and may have worn costumes of various kinds. He was a court favorite, and may very well have worn court dress when at court, or the artist may have invested him with a new suit. Rodin has made a perfectly nude statue of Victor Hugo, but it does not follow that Victor Hugo walked about the streets of Paris unadorned.

The Droeshout engraving in the *Folio* is accompanied by ten lines of verse in which Ben Jonson tells the reader to

"Look

Not on his picture, but his book."

The meaning of this is very plain. The book was Shakespeare himself; the picture but a poor representation of him. Nobody

but a Baconian could possibly misunderstand what Jonson meant. A Baconian can misunderstand anything.

Both this portrait and the Stratford bust—whitewashed, repainted, restored every now and then—were crude and inartistic attempts at a posthumous likeness. We know how little the newspaper cuts of our day resemble the originals—many of them would justify the victim in a libel suit. In Shakespeare's age, the artists were even less adept and less conscientious, and Martin Droeshout was just beginning his career. Other Shakespeare portraits by Janssen, Soest, Gilliland, Donford, and others, are all painted from tradition, not from life. That any of all these pictures resemble one another or the Stratford bust is more remarkable than that they differ.

What is known as the Chandos portrait bears a slight likeness to the portraits of Bacon, observable mostly by Baconians. This portrait was once owned by Sir William D'Avenant—the same who, as a boy, spoke of Shakespeare as his godfather, and was warned by some village wiseacre not to take the name of God in vain. D'Avenant's brother, who became a parson in later life, used to tell with pride that when he was a child, Shakespeare had given him "a hundred kisses" on visits to their father's inn. In his youth D'Avenant

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must have seen Shakespeare often, and this would justify the belief that the Chandos portrait must have been a good likeness. This applies also to the Shakespeare bust at the Garrick Club in London; this bust came from D'Avenant's theater, and was likely made from the Chandos portrait. A superficial resemblance to some of Bacon's portraits surely can have no bearing upon the question who wrote the plays. Some portraits of Beethoven look like Napoleon—did the Corsican compose the *Eroica*?

We are told that Byron, Coleridge, Beaconsfield, Bright, Hallam, Dickens, Whittier, and others have doubted Shakespeare's authorship. This claim resolves itself into the wonderment exhibited by these men over the fact that one born in Shakespeare's station should divulge such brilliant genius. Such surprise might be more justly expressed over Burns, Chatterton, and a host of others. The mother of Euripides sold vegetables; Ben Jonson himself was a bricklayer's son; Marlowe's father was a shoemaker. Genius is the blue flower that grows upon the Alpine height, to be plucked by the wayfarer who went forth with no such purpose. It is the sudden star that flashes through the night unheralded by any trump of angel from the high heavens. It is no more pos-

sible to trace the genesis of genius, than to unravel the strands of the rainbow or to trace ocean's waves to their generative cloud.

“A man's education is to be inferred from his actual works, not his possible works from his education,” writes Horace J. Bridges. But even admitting the ignorance of Shakespeare, would not establish Bacon as the author. The Baconians insist that whoever wrote Shakespeare's works must have understood Latin and Greek, French, Italian, and Spanish—they insist that Bacon had mastered all these languages, whereas the unlearned actor Shakespeare knew nothing of them. But that Shakespeare's ignorance is a myth has been already shown. Ben Jonson, who knew him well, says he “had small Latin and less Greek,” whence it follows that he had some Greek and more Latin. His knowledge of French, displayed in the wooing of Katharine in *King Henry V*, is not anything to boast of; and his knowledge of Italian is somewhat doubtful, as the Italian stories supplying some of his plots had all become accessible in English translations, except the sources of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. His acquaintance with Spanish is still more problematic; Montemayor, who furnished the suggestion for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*,

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had been translated into English shortly before Shakespeare made use of that material. Still, aside from his schooling, there is nothing essentially improbable in Shakespeare's having acquired a certain facility in all these languages, living in a large seaport where ships and sailors of every nation came together. There is a strong probability that in the plague year 1603 he may have visited Italy; and if he did so, he probably went through France, or more likely through Germany, which many companies of English comedians visited about that time. Certainly Jakob Ayrer, a Nuremberg poet, either knew of *The Tempest*, or else Shakespeare knew of Ayrer's *Beautiful Sidea*. I like to think that possibly Shakespeare may have met this disciple of Hans Sachs and discussed with him, over a stoup of foaming Bavarian beer, the decay of the drama, since the inspired cobbler had been laid to rest.

It is a sad mistake to assume that superior erudition was required to write the works ascribed to Shakespeare. They contain nothing that any man of average intelligence might not have learned in five or six years of miscellaneous reading. There are hundreds of blunders and inconsistencies, from the clock which strikes three in *Julius Caesar* to the cannons in *Macbeth*, the seacoast of Bohemia, etc.,

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which so learned a scholar as Bacon would never have let pass. Would he let Hector talk of Aristotle eight centuries before the Stagirite was born, or make Giulio Romano, born in the year of America's discovery, contemporaneous with the Delphic Oracle, which Theodosius abolished A. D. 392? Would he pass sixpences as current coin in Ephesus, or make allusion to spectacles in *King Lear*—a tragedy which plays “when Joas reigned in Juda,” while spectacles were probably invented about 1290 A. D.?

Shakespeare made these blunders; Bacon would not have made them. It is not the learning that is in Shakespeare's plays that makes them the rarest jewels in the world's literature. It is the magical mastery of language, the deep insight into the souls of men and women, the marvelous dramatic power in every scene and character, that puts the plays upon a pinnacle. These things Bacon did not have, while the learning which we know he had is not in evidence in the plays any more than his laborious touch.

In a letter to Sir Tobie Matthew, who translated the *Essays* into Italian, Bacon says:

“My great work goeth forward; and after my manner, I alter ever when I add.

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So that nothing is final until all be finished.”

It is said that Bacon rewrote the *Essays* thirty times. Rawley saw at least twelve copies of the *Instauratio*, revised year by year. This, as we learn from Jonson's sneering criticism, was entirely different from the literary method of Shakespeare, who rarely altered a line. When Heminge and Condell thought to praise Shakespeare's fluency, saying they had “scarce received from him a blot in his papers,” Jonson vehemently wished that he “had blotted a thousand lines.”

Jonson was one of Shakespeare's friends, one with whom he had many wit combats at the Mermaid Tavern, and he owed Shakespeare a great debt of gratitude, for Shakespeare used his influence at the theater to secure the acceptance and production of Rare Ben's first play. Jonson is one of those who have borne witness to Shakespeare's renown, though the Baconians make much ado over the fact that, in a list of great English poets, he does not mention Shakespeare, but calls Francis Bacon the greatest of all poets. We know that Jonson was also a friend of Bacon's, and that he was somewhat envious of Shakespeare; we know that he said Shakespeare “wanted art,” and had “small Latin and less Greek;” but in all

that Jonson ever wrote he never voiced any doubt that his friend Shakespeare had produced the plays, and it is to him we owe the verdict: "He was not for an age, but for all time."

The cool assertion that whoever wrote Shakespeare must have been a lawyer, because the plays abound in judicial arguments and legal allusions, all exhibiting the mind of a great jurist like Bacon, is almost answered sufficiently by the tradition that Shakespeare was in his youth a noverint, or lawyer's clerk. The Baconians, however, in their efforts to blacken the Stratford man's character, crow loudly over the fact that he was continually engaged in lawsuits to recover loans or annex real estate; and if this be so, he may easily have acquired his legal knowledge by association with lawyers, or from his father, who is known to have been involved in over forty lawsuits. One Baconian, when confronted with strong evidence that the plays contain hints of a lawsuit in which Shakespeare himself was interested, suggested that Bacon must have been Shakespeare's counsel. There are at most one hundred and fifty legal allusions in the plays, and they by no means justify the statement of Thomas Nash that "the author of *Hamlet* was a jurist and the son of a jurist." He might as well have said

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that the author of *The Tempest* was a sailor and the son of a sea-cook.

All such deductions from the supposed knowledge or supposed ignorance of the two men lead much further than desired. For instance, it would be easy to show from many passages about horses that Shakespeare was a great lover of the horse, and knew horses better than most men did. There being a tradition that, soon after he came to London, Shakespeare was employed at holding horses in front of the theaters, this by Baconian logic should be taken as proof that he, and none other, could have written the plays. The natural history we have in Shakespeare's plays is such as he would have learned in Warwickshire and along the Avon; it is not the natural history derived from books and scientific research, such as most of Bacon's was. The medical lore contained in the plays also is empiric; not such learned matter as Bacon had excogitated.

The utterly unpoetic bent of Bacon's mind, apart from the proof afforded by his so-called poems, is shown by the fact that in all his writings he makes no mention of, or reference to, any contemporary English poet—not Shakespeare, nor Spenser, nor Chaucer, nor Sidney, nor any other of the golden-throated choir that made his age the most illustrious since the days of Peri-

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cles. Poetry was to him a sealed book—with all his scholarship he does not appear to have heard of Dante or Petrarch, of Ronsard or de Bellay, nor does he often allude to Ovid or Virgil, with whose poetry Shakespeare was saturated. Read Bacon's essay on *Love*—love, which he called "the child of folly;" then read *Romeo and Juliet*—it is not possible to conceive of the same pen writing both. Read Bacon's masque, *The Marriage of the Thames and the Rhine*, and then read any of the interludes in Shakespeare's plays—the stilted classicism of the one and the romantic grace of the others afford a most instructive contrast. "There is as great a difference between Shakespeare and Bacon," writes Walter Savage Landor, "as between an American forest and a London timber-yard." Gruff old Thomas Carlyle just about hit the nail on the head when he bluntly told poor Delia Bacon: "Your Bacon could have created the earth as easily as *Hamlet*."

Even the moral character of the men is fundamentally dissimilar. Bacon's ingratitude and treachery toward his friend and benefactor Essex is a black blot upon his fame. One might paraphrase the words of Antony: "For *Essex*, as you know, was *Bacon's* angel." When Essex became involved in a conspiracy against

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Queen Elizabeth, Bacon assisted the prosecuting attorney, and it was Bacon's merciless argument that sent Essex to the axe. No compunction restrained the brilliant and self-seeking man from this much-censured action, which rendered him very unpopular in England, and afterward he wrote a book to malign the friend he had slain. What was Shakespeare's attitude under similar circumstances? Southampton, to whom was dedicated *Venus and Adonis*, was involved in the same conspiracy, and was exiled. Shakespeare, though a favorite at the court of Queen Elizabeth, is the only one of the noted poets of that time who wrote no threnody of grief when the Queen died—and the reason commonly assigned for this was her harsh treatment of his friend and patron, who was recalled when James ascended the throne. Here we see Shakespeare, the warm-hearted and impulsive player, in contrast with the cold-blooded and calculating lawyer. It was utterly unlike Bacon to put friendship ahead of policy and pride ahead of profit. There probably never has been another intellect as masterful as Bacon's coupled with a heart so pusillanimous and groveling. His abject humility is almost oriental—Pope called him the “*meanest of mankind.*”

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To my mind there is one conclusive chain of evidence which shows the great plays were written by the actor William Shakespeare. One might possibly conceive of Bacon's having written them, and using another man's name, but certainly if he had written them, this lawyer would never have permitted another man to reap the rewards. Bacon was chronically hard up; he was once arrested in the street for a debt; he was a prodigal spendthrift, who as judge accepted bribes to make ends meet; when he died he owed more than one hundred thousand dollars, equivalent to nearly a million in our day. Shakespeare, on the other hand, accumulated a considerable fortune as the result of his various activities—as playwright, as player, as manager. During his best years his income has been estimated at six hundred pounds or about three thousand dollars a year, equivalent to nearly twenty-five thousand in our day. Now if Lord Bacon wrote the plays, why did he not “take the cash,” even though he “let the credit go”?

The other argument, to my mind no less conclusive, is that the plays were undoubtedly written by an actor, by a man familiar with the traditions of the stage, by a man who had one eye upon the people in the pit, and the other upon the pile of coin in the box-office. Bacon knew almost

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nothing of the theater. In the same year that saw the appearance of the *First Folio*, Bacon wrote that "the drama had flourished in ancient days, but now was in neglect." At that very time there were fourteen theaters in London, giving daily performances before many thousands, and producing plays by a galaxy of dramatists whose like the world had not seen since the days of Sophocles and Menander. The author of the Shakespeare plays shows that he is a player even by his fondness for similes of the theater. It would never occur to a lawyer like Bacon to write the picturesque apologue of life uttered by the melancholy Jaques:

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages."

None but an actor, and a good one, could have written the advice to the players in *Hamlet*. None but an actor would have thought of Macbeth's pathetic figure of Life as

"A poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more."

None but an actor would or could have written the delicious comedy scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the ef-

forts of amateurs are mocked with true professional superiority. None but a share-owner in a theater would have scored the rivalry of the children's companies, which were hurting the regular playhouses, as Shakespeare scores them in *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. There is even a reference to "a fellowship in a cry of players" by Hamlet, with an appreciation of the difference in value between "half a share" and "a whole one," which points to Shakespeare the manager.

Parolles, in *All's Well That Ends Well*, making sport of Captain Dumaine's "expertness in war," declares that "he has led the drum before the English tragedians." It may be that we have here a reminiscence of a continental tour, and probably an allusion to the players' parade through the towns they visited.

"As in a theater, the eyes of men
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious."

This utterance, put into the mouth of the king's uncle, the Duke of York, in *Richard II*, is another of those similes from the playhouse which show Shakespeare to have been an actor. Take the lines—

"Like a strutting player whose conceit
Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich
To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
Twixt his stretcht footing and the scaffolage."

Only a player who had heard the hollow planks echo his haughty tread, and had rejoiced in the noise he was making to impress the ears of his audience, could have written these lines in *Troilus and Cressida*. None but an actor could have portrayed stage-fright as he does in *Sonnet XXIII*:

“As an imperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put beside his part.”

Two actors of Shakespeare's company, Lowin and Taylor, who survived him by fifty years, had been coached by him, one in the part of Hamlet, the other in Henry VIII. Christopher Beeston, another of Shakespeare's fellow players, told his son that Shakespeare “did act exceedingly well,” and also that “he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country,” which may account for the pedagogic echoes in some of the early plays. It may be said that this testimony is hearsay, but it may be answered that hearsay of this nature, too simple to be invention, has greater validity than all the testimony extracted by Baconian torture from sentences meaning something quite different.

Shakespeare may have been a mere actor, descended from generations of nobodies, or he may have been of the bluest-blooded stock in England—what care we? Mrs. Charlotte C. Stopes, one of the most

indefatigable of Shakespearean students, contends in her book on *Shakespeare's Family*, that "by the Spear-side his family was at least respectable, and by the Spindle-side his pedigree can be traced straight back to Guy of Warwick and the good King Alfred." Little the world cares—no royal lineage could add to the glory of his name, which is Shakespeare.

It is absurd to suppose that such a secret as Bacon's authorship of the Shakespeare plays could have been kept, since it must have been known to so many others besides Shakespeare and Bacon—to the actors, to the printers, to the families and friends of both men. To get over this difficulty, the Baconians say that Ben Jonson, Rawley, Matthew, and the writers of the *Odes* undoubtedly did know Bacon wrote the Shakespeare plays, and that many allusions to such knowledge are found in their pages. Since Jonson repeatedly bears witness to Shakespeare's authorship of the plays—since neither he nor any of the others ever denied it—these fancied allusions are absolutely pointless. No one questioned Shakespeare's authorship until crazy Delia Bacon started all the Donnellies, Gallups, Potts, and Booths to hunting ciphers, and as each of them has found a different cipher, we are warranted

in taking them all with several grains of salt. The theories invented to account for Bacon's concealment of an activity he should have been proud to acknowledge, surpass the frenzied fictions of E. Phillips Oppenheim and the veracious revelations of Prussian spies.

Two witnesses would suffice to put the whole case of the Baconians out of court. First let us call Francis Meres, born in 1565, who studied at Cambridge and wrote a literary history of his period, entitled *Palladis Tamia, Wit's Treasury*, which was published in 1598 and written about two years earlier. Meres, put upon the witness-stand, gives this testimony:

“As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared sonnets among his private friends, etc.

“As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for Comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love's Labour's Lost*, his *Love's Labour's Wonne*, his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and his *Merchant*

of *Venice*; for Tragedy, his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

“As Epius Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus’ tongue, if they would speak Latin; so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare’s fine filed phrase, if they would speak English.”

Francis Meres was a scholar, writing in mature years, in the midst of the matters he describes—a competent reporter of the current knowledge of his age. His evidence outweighs a hundred guesses and a hundred doubts. But let us put Francis Bacon himself on the witness stand, to testify as to his ability to write poetry. He boasts in his *Apology concerning Essex* that he once prepared a sonnet, “and I remember I shewed it to a great person, and one of my lord’s nearest friends who commended it.” We demand to see this sonnet, but it is not among the exhibits of the case. At last the witness produces a real poem which he wrote, and which was published in a collection by Thomas Farnaby in 1629. Here it is:

The world’s a bubble, and the life of man
Less than a span,

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In his conception wretched from the wombe,
So to the tombe;
Curst from the cradle, and brought up to yeares
With cares and feares.

Who then to frail mortality shall trust,
But limmes the water, or but writes in dust.

Yet, since with Sorrow here we live opprest,
What life is best?

Courts are but only superficial Schooles
To dandle Fooles:

The Rurall parts are turn'd into a Den
Of savage men:

And where's a City from all Vice so free,
But may be termed the worst of all the three?

Domesticke Cares afflict the Husband's Bed,
Or paines his Head:

Those that live single, take it for a Curse,
Or doe things worse:

Some would have Children, those that have them none;
Or wish them gone:

What is it then to have, or have no Wife,
But single Thraldome, or a double Strife?

Our owne Affections still at home to please,
Is a Disease:

To crosse the Sea to any forraigne Soile,
Perils and Toile:

Warres with their noyse affright us: when they cease,
W'are worse in Peace:

What then remaines? but that we still should cry,
Not to be borne, or being borne, to dye.

After consideration of this poem, no doubt a genuine production of Francis Bacon's, we should be ready to acquit him at

once of the charge against him, that he forged the works of William Shakespeare. He might be capable of producing the works of Isaac Watts or Michael Wigglesworth, but hardly any higher flights. No other witnesses are needed.

The Baconian theory is the abdication of common-sense and the apotheosis of humbug. Started by Delia Bacon, encouraged by the Potts and the Donnellies, the paradox has fascinated such minds as Lord Palmerston, Wilhelm Preyer, and Friedrich Nietzsche. It even became fashionable in certain pseudo-literary circles to doubt whether Shakespeare could have written the plays, and to admit that Bacon might have done so. What is the value of the testimony of a hundred people who do not know? Even though Theodore Roosevelt and Doctor Munyon, Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Billy Sunday announced their belief that Bacon had written the plays of Shakespeare, that would not alter the plain facts known to every sane man that knows something about Shakespeare. We know all the essential points of his life; we know that the plays were produced at the theater of which he was part owner; we know that all his friends and contemporaries considered him the author, and that he gathered the financial rewards of authorship; we

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know that before he died, playwrights like Drayton and Jonson visited him at Stratford—for what reason if not to talk shop? And we know that after he died, certain of his player friends collected his scattered plays and had them printed as a memorial to the author. No one dreamed of connecting Francis Bacon with them; no one to-day, who has read both Bacon and Shakespeare, should suspect Bacon of being able to write Shakespeare, any more than Shakespeare of being able to write Bacon. They are two minds of entirely different metal. Shakespeare was a synthetic genius; he built up, out of all the materials accumulated in miscellaneous reading, a world of his own—a world peopled by a multitude of characters not even surpassed by Balzac and Dickens. Bacon's mind was of the analytic type, which takes apart the knowledge of the world, dissects its parts, penetrates into the vital recesses of truth. Knowing so much about both men, we find hardly a niche in the life of either, into which the necessary postulates of the Baconian theory would fit. It must be dismissed as one of the strangest delusions, the almost incomprehensible aberrations, that the human mind has ever been guilty of. It is merely another proof of the fact that any truth, however clear and venerable, can be

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obscured by sly insinuation and raucous denial; that any theory, however tenuous and absurd, will find adherents if it is propagated vociferously and persistently. It would be far better if these people, who “mistake assumption for argument and possibility for proof,” were to expend their misdirected energy in reading Shakespeare—especially the cryptic utterance of the Fool in *Twelfth Night*: “There is no darkness but ignorance,” and the significant, almost prophetic, exclamation of Puck: “Lord, what fools these mortals be!”

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